

COMMUTING BURDEN AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE AMONG URBAN OFFICE WORKERS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF RESOURCE DEPLETION, JOB DEMANDS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT IN AN URBAN AREA

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Abstract

Work-life balance is an increasingly pressing concern for office workers in urban areas, where the demands of work are often intensified by the realities of city life. Beyond heavy workloads, employees must also cope with long commutes, rising living costs, and limited opportunities to rest and recover. This study explores the factors that influence work-life balance among urban office workers, the challenges they face in maintaining it, and the types of support they expect from their organizations. A descriptive qualitative approach was used, drawing on responses from 104 office workers employed across the public sector, private companies, NGOs, and state-owned enterprises. Data were gathered through open-ended questions and analyzed using thematic techniques. The analysis indicates that work-life balance is influenced by a combination of factors, including workload, time management, social support, workplace culture, flexible working arrangements, financial conditions, and an individual's ability to establish clear boundaries between professional and personal responsibilities. Among the challenges identified, urban mobility emerged as the most frequently mentioned issue, with participants highlighting traffic congestion, lengthy commuting times, transportation expenses, and exhaustion after work. Participants also described how work pressure, expectations to work overtime, the high cost of living in cities, environmental conditions such as pollution, and concerns about physical and mental health made it more difficult to achieve a healthy balance. Many respondents expressed a desire for greater organizational support, particularly through flexible work policies, hybrid or remote working options, clearer limits on working hours, respect for employees' personal time outside work, fairer workload allocation, and initiatives that support employee well-being. Overall, the findings indicate that work-life balance is not solely a matter of personal time management. Rather, it is shaped by the interaction between individual circumstances, organizational practices, and the broader challenges associated with urban living.

INTRODUCTION

Rapid urbanization in Indonesia has transformed major metropolitan areas into centers of economic opportunity, employment, and social mobility. According to the World Bank, Indonesia is projected to become predominantly urban, with more than 70% of its population expected to live in urban areas by 2045. (Roberts, Gil Sander, and Tiwari 2019). Cities such as Jakarta and the wider Jabodetabek Region attract workers from diverse social, educational, and occupational backgrounds because they offer greater access to formal employment, public services, and career advancement. However, the benefits of urban growth are increasingly accompanied by structural development challenges, particularly inadequate urban infrastructure, uneven spatial planning, traffic congestion, and long commute times. In rapidly urbanizing Indonesian cities, workers are not only exposed to organizational demands in the workplace but also to daily urban stressors generated by the mismatch between residential areas, employment centers, and transportation systems (Firman 2009; Roberts et al. 2019). These infrastructure deficits create time pressure, physical fatigue, financial costs, and psychological strain even before workers begin their formal workday (Novaco and Gonzalez 2009).

In metropolitan settings, employment opportunities remain concentrated in Jakarta and surrounding business districts, while rising housing costs push many workers to live farther from their workplaces. Consequently, daily commuting becomes a structural necessity rather than an individual choice. This spatial mismatch between residence and employment transforms mobility into a development issue that directly affects workers' access to time, energy, and well-being.

The scale of this problem is evident in contemporary mobility patterns. Data from Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS, 2023) show that millions of commuters travel daily across the Jabodetabek metropolitan area for work, while Jakarta consistently ranks among the most congested cities in Indonesia. According to the TomTom Traffic Index (2025), Jakarta recorded a congestion level of approximately 59,8. 8%.

The urban worker's day often begins before formal working hours. Before arriving at the workplace, workers may already be fatigued by traffic congestion, crowded public transportation, unpredictable schedules, and the psychological burden of delays caused by traffic jams. After completing their workday, they must navigate the same mobility challenges before reaching home. This repeated cycle reduces the time available for rest, caregiving, social interaction, religious activities, personal development, and leisure. This issue is particularly significant in Indonesia, where work-life balance is shaped not only by individual preferences but also by collectivist social norms and family obligations. Workers are expected to remain productive in their professional roles while simultaneously fulfilling responsibilities toward family. Work-life balance becomes not only an organizational issue but also a development outcome influenced by the quality of urban infrastructure and mobility systems.

The present study conceptualizes work-life balance as a personal resource that enables individuals to manage occupational demands and nonwork responsibilities

effectively. Work- life balance is not merely the equal allocation of time between work and personal life; rather, it reflects an individual' s perceived ability to manage energy, attention, emotional capacity, and social roles across multiple domains. In rapidly urbanizing Indonesian cities, this balance is increasingly challenged by infrastructure-related mobility burdens. When workers spend substantial amounts of time and energy commuting, fewer resources remain available for family interaction, recovery, and personal well- being. Thus, infrastructure becomes a critical factor shaping workers' experience of balance and imbalance.

This argument is supported by conservation of resources (CoR) theory. Hobfoll (1989) argues that individuals strive to acquire, maintain, and protect valued resources such as time, energy, health, emotional stability, and social support. According to COR Theory, stress arises when these resources are threatened, lost, or insufficiently replenished. In urban Indonesia, traffic congestion, long commuting times, and transportation uncertainty can be understood as mechanisms of resource loss. These factors consume physical energy, reduce discretionary time, and increase emotional strain. Furthermore, ovacano and Gonzales (2009) It was found that commuting is associated with elevated stress levels, reduced well-being, and lower satisfaction. When such resource losses recur, workers become increasingly vulnerable to stress and less able to maintain work-life balance.

Work-life balance has become a central construct in organizational behavior and human resource management because it directly influences employees' psychological well-being, organizational outcomes, and overall quality of life. According to (Kowalski et al. 2022) Work-life balance is positively associated with job satisfaction and negatively associated with job stress. Similarly, (Rashmi and Kataria 2021) Greater job autonomy, supervisor support, and coworker support significantly improve work-life balance, which subsequently enhances job satisfaction. These findings indicate that work-life balance functions not only as an indicator of employee well-being but also as a strategic organizational asset.

Recent studies further demonstrate that work-life balance is strongly linked to life satisfaction. (Mishra and Bharti 2023) showed that work-life balance significantly mediates the relationship between hybrid work arrangements and satisfaction with life. Likewise (Jiang, Xie, and Shao 2024)It was reported that work-life balance serves as an essential mechanism through which digital engagement and work flexibility contribute to life satisfaction. This relationship is particularly relevant in urban societies, where occupational and personal roles frequently overlap.

(Demerouti and Bakker 2016) Explain that employee well-being is shaped by the interplay between job demands and available resources. Traditional job demands include workload, performance pressure, emotional labor, and administrative responsibilities, while resources include autonomy, organizational support, flexibility, and recovery opportunities. However, in rapidly urbanizing cities, infrastructure deficits create an additional layer of demands outside the workplace. Long commutes and traffic

congestion act as external demands that intensify strain and accelerate resource depletion. Even when organizations provide supportive working conditions, workers may still experience exhaustion because the urban environment continuously consumes resources before and after work.

Job stress, therefore, should be understood not only as an organizational phenomenon but also as a development-related outcome shaped by urban infrastructure. Workers in both the public and private sectors operate within the same metropolitan environment marked by congestion, commuting burdens, and time scarcity. Although their organizational contexts may differ, they share exposure to infrastructure-related stressors that shape their daily experiences. This perspective shifts the focus from individual coping strategies to the broader structural conditions that generate stress and shape resources. Life satisfaction is the final cognitive evaluation of an individual's overall quality of life and can be viewed as an indicator of whether available resources are sufficient to meet personal and social demands. When workers perceive that they retain adequate time, energy, emotional stability, and social connection after fulfilling work and commuting obligations, they are more likely to report higher life satisfaction. Conversely, when infrastructure-related demands consume a substantial share of these resources, workers may evaluate their lives less positively. Life satisfaction is not merely a psychological outcome but also a reflection of how urban development conditions shape everyday experiences and opportunities for well-being.

Previous studies on work-life balance and life satisfaction have primarily focused on organizational policies, flexible work arrangements, workplace support, and individuals' coping strategies. For example (Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw 2003) examined how work-family balance contributes to quality of life. While research by (Kelly et al. 2014) Demonstrated that workplace flexibility and greater control over work schedules can improve employee well-being and reduce work-family conflict. (Haar, Russo, and Su 2013) Investigated the relationship between work-life balance and life satisfaction across multiple countries, emphasizing the importance of organizational and individual factors. Research based on the JD-R framework has also emphasized the importance of workplace demands and resources in shaping employee stress and well-being. (Bakker and Demerouti 2007). However, these studies primarily focus on organizational factors and pay limited attention to the broader urban environment in which workers live and commute.

In the Indonesian context, particularly in Jabodetabek and other rapidly urbanizing metropolitan areas, infrastructure deficits, commuting burdens, spatial inequality, and traffic congestion are not peripheral issues. They are structural conditions that directly affect workers' ability to conserve resources, manage competing responsibilities, and maintain well-being. Despite their significance, these urban development factors remain underexplored in the work-life balance and life satisfaction literature. As a result, existing studies may underestimate the role of infrastructure-related stressors in shaping worker well-being.

To address this gap, the present study integrates urban infrastructure conditions into the examination of work-life balance, job stress, and life satisfaction. Specifically, the study conceptualizes traffic congestion and long commuting times as external demands that contribute to resource depletion. Drawing on CoR theory and the JD-R model, the study proposes that infrastructure-related stressors increase job stress, reduce workers' ability to maintain work-life balance, and ultimately influence life satisfaction. By examining these relationships, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of employee well-being in rapidly urbanizing Indonesian cities and highlights the importance of urban development conditions in shaping everyday experiences of work and life. This study offers novelty by repositioning traffic congestion and long commuting times from background urban conditions to structural mechanisms of resource depletion. By integrating Conservation of Resources theory and the Job Demands–Resources model, the study explains how infrastructure deficits in rapidly urbanizing Indonesian cities create external demands that intensify job stress, constrain work-life balance, and shape life satisfaction. The study thus connects employee well-being research with urban development, mobility, and spatial inequality in the context of Indonesia's urban areas.

Literature Review

Work-life balance has become a central concept in organizational studies due to its strong association with employee well-being and quality of life. Work-life balance refers to an individual's ability to maintain equilibrium between work responsibilities and personal life demands. Previous studies consistently demonstrate that employees who achieve better work-life balance tend to experience lower stress, higher job satisfaction, and greater psychological well-being.. (Aruldoss et al. 2021) found that work-life balance is positively associated with job satisfaction and negatively associated with job stress. Employees who successfully balance their professional and personal roles generally report greater emotional stability and overall life satisfaction. Similarly, (Jiang et al. 2024) emphasized that work life balance serve as an important mechanism linkin work flexibility and digital engagement to higher levels of life satisfaction.

In the Indonesian context, empirical studies on work-life balance remain relatively limited. Nevertheless, several studies provide preliminary evidence regarding its importance. (Barokah et al. 2025) found that work-life balance significantly influences organizational behavior and employee performance in Indonesia. Furthermore (Marthalina et al. 2024) reported that work life balance due to dual role pressure between work and family responsibilities. These findings indicate that maintaining work life balance remains a significant challenge for Indonesia workers, particularly in urban settings characterized by high work intensity and social obligations.

Work-life balance has increasingly been examined not merely as an organizational benefit, but as a psychological and relational resource that enables individuals to preserve time, emotional stability, and cognitive capacity across work and non-work domains. (Greenhaus et al. 2003) conceptualize work-family balance as the relatively

equal distribution of time, involvement, and satisfaction between work and family roles, while later studies broaden this concept to the wider work-life interface, including personal, social, and community obligations beyond the nuclear family.

In this study, work-life balance is treated as a personal energy resource within Conservation of Resources Theory. CoR theory holds that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect valued resources, and that stress arises when these resources are threatened, lost, or insufficiently replenished (Hobfoll 1989). From this perspective, work-life balance is not simply a desirable employment condition but a protective resource that allows workers to conserve emotional energy, recover from work demands, maintain family and social relationships, and preserve a sense of control over daily life.

This is particularly relevant to some urban workers in rapidly urbanizing metropolitan areas. Employees do not only face formal job demands, such as workload, deadlines, administrative pressure, and performance targets. They also experience non-work demands, including commuting time, traffic congestion, household responsibilities, extended family expectations, and informal obligations. Therefore, work-life balance becomes a resource that helps workers manage multiple domains without the continual depletion of emotional and temporal resources.

Some of the literature supports the idea that work-life balance is associated with positive well-being outcomes. (Sirgy and Lee 2018) An integrative review shows that work-life balance is linked to quality of life, well-being, and role satisfaction. (Haar et al. 2013) Research has found that work-life balance is positively associated with job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and mental health across several cultural contexts, although the strength of the relationship may vary according to cultural values such as individualism, collectivism, and gender egalitarianism. This is important for an Indonesian study because the effect of work-life balance should not be assumed to operate identically across all societies. In collectivist contexts, personal balance is shaped not only by individual preferences but also by obligations to family, community, seniority, and social harmony.

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model provides a complementary explanation of how workplace conditions shape employee well-being. The original JD-R model classifies working conditions into two broad categories, job demands and job resources. Job demands refer to the physical, psychological, or organizational aspects of work that require sustained effort and are therefore associated with physiological or psychological costs, while job resources help employees achieve work goals, reduce job demands, and stimulate growth and development.

In this study, job stress is conceptualized as an environmental stressor that accelerates the loss of personal resources. Within the JD-R model, job stress emerges when job demands exceed the resources available to employees. Within CoR theory, this condition produces resource loss because individuals must continuously invest energy, attention, and emotional control to survive workplace pressure. (Hobfoll 1989) argue

that resources loss is more powerful than resources gain and can produce loss spiral when individuals are unable to recover or replenish resources.

This means that job stress should not be treated merely as another independent variable. Analytically, it functions as a resource-depleting condition. When job stress is high, employees may still report some degree of work-life balance, but the protective value of that balance can weaken because available resources are already being consumed by work pressure. In other words, job stress may reduce the ability of work-life balance to improve life satisfaction because the individual's remaining resource pool has already been depleted.

The logic is consistent with later developments of JD-R theory, which explain that job demands are strongly linked to exhaustion, while job resources are linked to motivation, engagement, and well-being. In the context of urban Indonesian cities, job stress may arise not only from organizational workload but also from urban pressures surrounding work, such as long travel times and congestion.

Job stress has been widely recognized as a critical factor affecting employee well-being. Job stress refers to the psychological and physiological responses that arise when job demands exceed an individual's coping capacity. Previous studies indicate that high levels of job stress weaken the positive relationship between work-life balance and well-being outcomes. (Halim Özkan and Başol 2025) found that job stress significantly reduces life satisfaction. Similarly, (Rodríguez-Rivas et al. 2023) Perceived stress directly reduces an individual's life satisfaction. In the context of work-life balance, employees experiencing high job stress may not fully benefit from positive work-life balance conditions because stress consumes the emotional and cognitive resources needed to maintain well-being.

The urban Indonesian context presents unique challenges related to work-life balance and employee well-being. Rapid urbanization in major cities such as Jabodetabek has intensified work demands, commuting burdens, and technological connectivity. Employees in urban areas often face long working hours, traffic congestion, and overlapping professional and social responsibilities, all of which may reduce their ability to maintain work-life balance.

Quality evidence from Indonesia shows that long working hours and social obligations frequently limit employees' personal time and recovery opportunities. (Wardani and Firmansyah 2021) It was noted that Indonesian workers often struggle to maintain balance due to high workloads and collectivist expectations. Similarly, (Hartini et al. 2024) It was reported that heavy shift systems and excessive work pressure contribute to physical and psychological exhaustion among workers.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach to examine how office workers in urban areas experience and interpret work-life balance in their everyday lives. This approach was considered appropriate because work-life balance is shaped by various personal and workplace factors, such as job responsibilities, commuting experiences, individual circumstances, and the support received from the organization. Therefore, the study focused on understanding how participants perceive, manage, and give meaning to their experiences in balancing work and personal life. The study was informed by the Conservation of Resources (CoR) Theory and the Job Demands Resources (JD-R) Model. The CoR Theory explains how individuals attempt to maintain important resources, including time, energy, and opportunities for recovery, while the JD-R Model explains how the relationship between job demands and available workplace resources may influence employees' ability to maintain work-life balance.

In this study, data were collected through participants' responses to open-ended questions from January 7 to March 23, 2026, involving 104 office workers in urban areas from different employment backgrounds, including government institutions, private organizations, non-governmental organizations, and state-owned enterprises. Of these, 62 participants were women and 42 were men. The average age of participants was approximately 31 years, with an average tenure of about four years. They represented various professional roles and work arrangements, including work from office (WFO), work from home (WFH), and hybrid work settings. The diversity of participants' backgrounds enabled the study to explore different perspectives on the challenges and strategies involved in achieving work-life balance in urban work environments. Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire, allowing participants to share their experiences and viewpoints in their own words. The questions focused on several aspects related to work-life balance, including workload, time and energy management, commuting challenges, work flexibility, organizational support, work-life boundaries, and personal well-being.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher began by reviewing participants' responses multiple times to gain an overall understanding of their experiences. Relevant statements were then coded and grouped into categories to identify recurring patterns and themes. Several themes emerged, including workload pressure, time-management difficulties, fatigue, commuting experiences, flexibility in work arrangements, supervisor support, organizational policies, and the challenge of maintaining boundaries between work and personal life. To strengthen the credibility of the findings, the interpretation process was closely tied to participants' original responses. Direct quotations were included in the results section to illustrate the themes and support the researcher's interpretations. Participants' identities were protected by using codes such as P1, P2, and P3. Although the data were obtained through written responses rather than interviews, the range of participants' experiences provided meaningful insights into how urban office workers understand and navigate work-life balance.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Results

This study explored how urban office workers understand and experience work-life balance while living and working in large metropolitan areas. Participants rarely viewed work-life balance as something that depended solely on individual choices or personal time management. Instead, they described it as shaped by the combined influence of work demands, organizational practices, and the realities of urban life. Across the narratives, traffic congestion, long commutes, heavy workloads, financial pressures, and workplace expectations were often intertwined, affecting participants' ability to care for themselves, spend time with loved ones, and meet responsibilities outside work. Overall, work-life balance was portrayed as an ongoing effort to manage time, energy, health, family commitments, and financial stability within the constraints of city living. For many participants, work-life balance was closely tied to having enough time and energy for life beyond work. Time was consistently described as the most valuable resource and one that was increasingly difficult to protect.

"Hal yang paling berpengaruh terkait keseimbangan pekerjaan dan kehidupan pribadi adalah waktu" (The factor that most significantly influences work-life balance is time.) (P6, public sector, hybrid work).

"Jumlah pekerjaan yang konsisten melebihi jam kerja normal secara signifikan dapat mengganggu waktu pribadi" (A workload that consistently exceeds regular working hours can significantly disrupt personal time)(P29, private sector, work from office).

Participants often emphasized that work-life balance was not simply a matter of personal discipline. Rather, it was heavily influenced by organizational structures, staffing levels, and workload distribution. One academic participant described how staff shortages and multiple institutional responsibilities created ongoing pressure:

"Jumlah dosen dan mahasiswa di tempat kerja saya tidak seimbang, contohnya ketika membimbing mahasiswa, seorang dosen bisa membimbing 17 orang mahasiswa TA.. dan itu sangat tidak ideal. Pun saat dosen diminta utk menjadi panitia dari berbagai acara besar. Sangat menyita waktu Tri Dharma" ("The ratio of lecturers to students at my workplace is unbalanced. For example, when supervising undergraduate theses, a single lecturer may be responsible for supervising up to 17 students, which is far from ideal. In addition, lecturers are frequently assigned to organizing committees for various major events, which consumes a significant amount of time that should be devoted to the Tri Dharma of Higher Education.) (P52, public sector, work from office).

These accounts suggest that imbalance often stemmed from systemic workplace conditions rather than individual shortcomings. Some participants even questioned whether perfect balance was realistically achievable. Instead, they described balance as a process of constant adjustment.

"Work life harmony, tidak lagi mencari balance. Karena ga akan pernah balance, tapi harmoni, kadang lembur, kadang tenggo, kadang sabtu masuk, kadang cuti 2 minggu"

(I no longer pursue work-life balance because it is never truly achievable. Instead, I focus on work-life harmony—some days require overtime, some days I leave work on time, sometimes I work on Saturdays, and other times I can take two weeks of leave)(P12, NGO, hybrid work).

The idea of “harmony” reflects a more flexible understanding of work-life balance, in which people adapt to changing circumstances rather than striving for an equal split between work and personal life. Participants also emphasized the importance of maintaining boundaries between work and non-work domains. As one participant explained:

“Perlu adanya kesadaran untuk menciptakan batasan yang jelas antara waktu bekerja dan waktu bagi kehidupan pribadi dengan memberikan sikap asertif terhadap kondisi tersebut” (Individuals need to develop greater awareness of the importance of setting clear boundaries between work and personal life, supported by assertive behavior in protecting those boundaries)(P84, public sector, hybrid work).

“Jam kerja yang tidak melewati batas waktu semestinya, dan permintaan atasan untuk menyelesaikan tugas di luar waktu kerja atau pada saat weekend” (Work should remain within normal working hours, and supervisors should not expect employees to complete tasks outside working hours or on weekends) (P65, private sector, work from office).

Taken together, these narratives show that work-life balance is experienced less as a fixed state and more as a continuous negotiation of time, workload, and personal boundaries. One of the most striking themes across participants’ responses was the role of urban mobility in shaping everyday experiences of work-life balance. Traffic congestion, lengthy commutes, transportation costs, and travel-related fatigue were repeatedly identified as major challenges. Participants did not describe commuting as a minor inconvenience. Instead, they viewed it as a daily burden that consumed resources needed for rest, family life, and personal well-being.

“Kualitas udara di Jakarta yang sering kali buruk dapat berdampak negatif pada kesehatan pernapasan jangka panjang dan kesehatan secara keseluruhan, Biaya sewa tempat tinggal, dan kebutuhan sehari-hari di Jakarta relatif tinggi, yang dapat menyebabkan tekanan finansial signifikan meskipun dengan gaji yang kompetitif” (Jakarta's frequently poor air quality can have adverse long-term effects on respiratory health and overall well-being. In addition, the cost of housing and daily living expenses in Jakarta is relatively high, which can create significant financial pressure even for individuals earning competitive salaries) (P28, private sector, work from office).

This account illustrates that commuting-related challenges rarely occur in isolation. Traffic congestion was often experienced alongside environmental concerns and financial pressures, creating a broader sense of strain associated with urban living. Another participant directly linked commuting to fewer opportunities for rest and family interaction:

"Kemacetan dan waktu tempuh yang panjang, sehingga waktu istirahat dan waktu bersama keluarga berkurang. Biaya hidup tinggi (transportasi, makan, sewa/rumah) yang menekan kondisi finansial. Beban kerja dan budaya lembur, yang bisa berdampak pada kesehatan fisik dan mental" (Traffic congestion and lengthy commuting times leave less time for rest and family life. The high cost of living, particularly for transportation, food, and housing, creates considerable financial strain. Furthermore, heavy workloads and an overtime work culture may have detrimental effects on both physical and mental well-being) (P33, private sector, work from office).

Participants consistently described commuting as depleting resources that would otherwise be available for recovery after work. Long travel times left less time for exercise, leisure, sleep, and family engagement. One participant reported spending more than two hours commuting each day:

"Perjalanan ke kantor dan lalu lintas terlalu macet dan jarak tempuh lebih dari 2 jam" (The commute to the office is too congested, and the travel time exceeds two hours) (P2, private sector, work from office).

Others highlighted concerns related to transportation accessibility and costs, such as:

"akses pada kendaraan umum, biaya perjalanan dan kemacetan" (access to public transportation, travel costs, and traffic congestion) (P1, public sector, hybrid work).

These narratives point to one of the study's most important findings, namely that in metropolitan areas such as Jabodetabek, urban mobility itself is a significant source of resource depletion. Rather than serving merely as a backdrop to daily life, commuting actively shapes employees' ability to balance work and personal responsibilities. Alongside commuting challenges, participants frequently discussed pressures related to workload, performance expectations, overtime culture, and unclear job demands. These pressures often extended beyond the workplace, affecting family relationships, health, and overall quality of life. One participant explained:

"Tantangan saya adalah tingkat pekerjaan yang tinggi. Load pekerjaan yang tinggi mempengaruhi semua aspek dalam kehidupan baik dilingkungan kantor ataupun di lingkungan keluarga. Hal ini membutuhkan keterampilan dalam manajemen waktu agar bisa menyelesaikan pekerjaan tanpa mengorbankan waktu untuk yang lainnya" (My biggest challenge is the high workload. A heavy workload affects every aspect of my life, both in the workplace and within my family. This requires strong time management skills to complete my work without sacrificing time for other aspects of life.) (P88, public sector, hybrid work).

This statement highlights how work demands often spill over into other areas of life. Participants described not only the volume of work but also the uncertainty surrounding tasks and expectations as sources of stress. For example, one participant noted:

"Jika target tidak jelas dan masalahnya tidak dijelaskan dulu dengan jelas, dapat membuat pekerjaan menjadi lebih lama untuk diselesaikan" (If the targets are unclear and the problem is not explained clearly from the beginning, it can take longer to complete the work.) (P61, public sector, hybrid work).

Several participants also linked work demands to physical and psychological well-being. One participant observed:

"Ya. Pola hidup sedentari, kurang olahraga, dan stres kerja berdampak pada kesehatan fisik dan mental" (Yes. A sedentary lifestyle, lack of exercise, and work-related stress affect both physical and mental health) (P82, public sector, work from office).

Another highlighted the challenges faced by working mothers:

"pembagian waktu apalagi ibu pekerja capek banget" (Time management is especially challenging. It is particularly exhausting for working mothers) (P58, public sector, hybrid work).

These findings reveal that job pressure is experienced not only as a professional challenge but also as a factor that affects health, caregiving responsibilities, and everyday functioning. Importantly, participants often described work demands and urban pressures as cumulative. Heavy workloads, long commutes, and limited recovery time were not separate issues but overlapping challenges that reinforced one another. Financial concerns also emerged as a key aspect of work-life balance. Participants frequently cited the high cost of urban living, including transportation, housing, food, and family-related expenses. These financial pressures often intensified the difficulties associated with demanding jobs and lengthy commutes.

"Tantangan terbesar adalah tekanan kerja yang tinggi, ditambah kondisi LDR yang meningkatkan pengeluaran di tengah biaya hidup perkotaan yang sudah mahal. Kombinasi keduanya membuat keseimbangan hidup semakin sulit dijaga" (The biggest challenge is the high work pressure, combined with being in a long-distance relationship (LDR), which increases expenses amid the already high cost of living in the city. The combination of these two factors makes it even more difficult to maintain work-life harmony) (P77, public sector, hybrid work).

Others cited the social and lifestyle expectations associated with urban environments:

"kebutuhan sosial mahal. karna biaya lifestyle tinggi, harus cari tambahan kalau mau bisa ngikutin" (Social needs are expensive. Because the cost of maintaining a lifestyle is high, I have to find additional income if I want to keep up.) (P72, private sector, work from office).

"Maunya penghasilan yang stabil dan cukup. Selain itu, validasi dari orang-orang sekitar sepertinya cukup seru untuk keseimbangan hidupnya saya" (I want a stable and sufficient income. Besides that, receiving validation and support from the people

around me also seems important for achieving balance in my life) (P53, private sector, work from office).

These responses suggest that work-life balance is not only about managing time and workload. Economic security also plays a meaningful role in shaping how workers evaluate their quality of life and their ability to cope with the demands of urban living. When discussing organizational support, participants most often highlighted flexible work arrangements. Hybrid work, remote work, and flexible scheduling were viewed as valuable because they reduced commuting burdens and gave employees greater control over their daily routines. However, participants also emphasized that flexibility alone was not enough if workloads remained unrealistic or if employees were expected to be constantly available. A participant outlined a comprehensive vision of organizational

"Jam kerja fleksibel atau sistem hybrid/WFH, sehingga karyawan bisa mengatur waktu kerja dan kebutuhan pribadi dengan lebih seimbang. Batasan jam kerja yang jelas, termasuk mengurangi budaya lembur dan menghargai waktu di luar jam kerja." (Flexible working arrangements, such as hybrid work or working from home (WFH), enable employees to better manage their professional and personal responsibilities. In addition, clearly defined working hours, reduced expectations for overtime, and respect for employees' non-working time are essential for promoting work-life harmony) (P33, private sector, work from office).

This observation highlights that flexibility supports work-life balance only when paired with organizational norms that protect employees' personal time and opportunities for recovery. Participants consistently expressed a need for stronger organizational policies that safeguard rest and limit unnecessary work intrusions into personal life. Many called for clearer regulations on working hours, leave, and communication outside office hours. One participant suggested:

"Saat setelah jam kerja dan weekend atau sakit ataupun lagi cuti, berhenti lah kontak karyawan untuk suruh berkerja karena kita butuh istirahat" (After working hours, on weekends, during sick leave, or while on annual leave, employees should not be contacted and asked to work because they need time to rest.) (P37, private sector, work from office).

Notably, participants also proposed solutions that extended beyond the workplace. Given the significant burden of commuting, several respondents emphasized the need for transportation support. One participant suggested:

"Transportasi umum yang memadai Dan dapat menghubungkan pusat kota dengan tempat tinggal secara aman dan nyaman. Penguraian kemacetan" (There is a need for reliable public transportation that provides safe and comfortable connections between residential areas and the city center, along with effective measures to alleviate traffic congestion) (P17, private sector, hybrid work).

Another proposed:

“Insentif transportasi beracuan jarak tempuh dari rumah ke kantor” (Transportation incentives should be calculated according to the distance employees travel between their homes and the workplace) (P36, sektor swasta, bekerja dari kantor).

These responses reinforce the idea that work-life balance in urban settings cannot be addressed solely through organizational interventions. Broader transportation and mobility issues also shape employees' daily experiences and well-being. Taken together, the findings reveal that work-life balance among urban office workers is shaped by the interplay between workplace demands and urban living conditions. Participants described balance as a continuous effort to protect time, energy, health, family relationships, and financial stability. While workload, overtime expectations, and organizational culture remained important concerns, traffic congestion and long commutes emerged as particularly influential challenges because they consumed resources that workers would otherwise use for rest, recovery, and personal life. A key contribution of this study is demonstrating that urban mobility is deeply embedded in employees' experiences of work-life balance. Rather than functioning merely as a background feature of city life, commuting was repeatedly described as a factor that intensifies work-related pressures by reducing available time and energy. In this sense, traffic congestion and commuting burdens operate as everyday mechanisms through which urban environments shape employee well-being. At the same time, participants identified several resources that could help ease these challenges, including flexible work arrangements, clear work boundaries, fair workload distribution, supportive leadership, mental health support, adequate compensation, and transportation-related assistance. These findings underscore the importance of understanding work-life balance not only as an organizational issue but also as a phenomenon shaped by the broader urban environment in which employees live and work.

Analysis

The findings of this study indicate that work-life balance among workers cannot be reduced to a simple division of time between work and personal life. Rather, this balance is a dynamic process in which individuals strive to manage their resources amid work demands, urban mobility conditions, organizational support, and personal responsibilities. Although some workers feel able to manage their time, this does not necessarily reflect an ideal balance. Many still face emotional exhaustion and limited energy, which ultimately affect the quality of their lives outside of work.

According to (Greenhaus and Allen 2011) Work-life balance refers to an individual's ability to balance various life roles and derive satisfaction from each. However, in the context of this study, this balance is influenced not only by internal organizational factors but also by external pressures stemming from urban life. This makes work-life balance a dynamic condition, dependent on an individual's ability to maintain and manage their available resources in constantly changing situations.

The Burden of Urban Mobility as an External Demand

One of the most notable findings is the role of commuting as part of the daily pressures faced by workers. This activity is not merely a trip from home to work but also an experience that drains time, energy, and emotions. Traffic congestion, long travel distances, transportation costs, and travel uncertainties are part of a routine that repeats constantly and is difficult to avoid. From the perspective of Conservation of Resources (CoR), this situation can be understood as a form of resource loss, particularly of time and energy. When this loss occurs continuously without adequate opportunities for recovery, its impact can be felt on an individual's well-being. Thus, commuting is not merely a backdrop to workers' lives but an important aspect of the demands that directly affect their ability to maintain a work-life balance. These findings are also consistent with the research by (Clark et al. 2020), which shows that commuting is linked to subjective well-being through mechanisms such as stress and life satisfaction

Resource Depletion Due to the Combination of Commuting and Job Demands

The burden of commuting rarely stands alone. In many cases, this stress occurs alongside high job demands, such as a heavy workload, deadlines, performance targets, and work-related communication outside regular working hours. When these two factors occur simultaneously, workers must expend more energy, both physically and emotionally. Within the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework, this situation reflects a scenario in which high demands are not always balanced by adequate resources. (Bakker and Demerouti 2007). As a result, individuals are more vulnerable to burnout and face difficulties in fulfilling their roles outside of work. In this context, work-related stress does not arise suddenly but is the result of the accumulation of various demands that occur continuously. (Demerouti and Bakker 2016)

Work Life Balance as an Uneven Phenomenon

The results of this study indicate that work-life balance is not experienced equally across individuals. Some workers have free time after work but lack the energy to truly enjoy it. This suggests that work-life balance cannot be assessed solely by the amount of time available but must also account for the quality of the experience. From the perspective of recovery theory, the ability to psychologically detach from work is crucial. (Sonnentag and Fritz 2014). When individuals are unable to recover optimally, their free time does not yield significant benefits. Therefore, work-life balance must be understood as an interrelated combination of time, energy, and the quality of experience.

Organizational Support as a Mechanism for Restoring Resources

Support from the organization is one of the key factors that can help employees cope with these various demands. Forms of support such as work flexibility, a more equitable distribution of workloads, and limits on communication outside of working hours can help individuals maintain balance and reduce stress.

Work flexibility gives employees the freedom to manage their time and work methods according to their needs. However, this flexibility does not always have a positive impact if it is not accompanied by clear guidelines. In some cases, flexibility actually blurs the line between work and personal life, causing employees to remain connected to their work even outside of working hours (Allen et al. 2013)

Furthermore, organizational support also has its limitations. Although policies such as work-from-home arrangements can reduce the frequency of commuting, larger issues such as traffic congestion, housing affordability, and the distance between home and work remain challenges that are difficult to address through organizational policies alone.

Life Satisfaction as an Assessment of Remaining Resources

In this study, life satisfaction can be understood as how individuals assess their overall living conditions after facing various demands. From the COR perspective, life satisfaction reflects the extent to which individuals still have sufficient resources to live well. (Hobfoll 1989) When individuals still have time, energy, emotional stability, and well-maintained social relationships, they tend to feel more satisfied with their lives. Conversely, if the loss of resources occurs continuously without adequate recovery, life satisfaction becomes more vulnerable. This is also consistent with the concept of life satisfaction as a cognitive evaluation of overall quality of life (Diener et al. 1985)

Patterns by Employment Sector

Differences across employment sectors reveal variations in the types of demands faced. However, in general, workers in both the public and private sectors face similar patterns of stress, namely a combination of job demands and the burdens of urban mobility. This suggests that work-life balance is influenced not only by job characteristics but also by environmental conditions common to all workers in urban areas. Thus, the stress experienced by workers is cross-sectoral in nature and arises from the interaction between organizational and environmental factors. This reinforces the view that work-life balance needs to be understood within a broader context, not limited solely to the work environment.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this study offers a broader view of work-life balance by linking the Conservation of Resources (CoR) and Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theories in the context of urban mobility. Commuting burdens and traffic congestion are no longer seen as mere background conditions but as demands that tangibly affect workers' well-being through resource depletion. (Bakker and Demerouti 2007; Hobfoll 1989) From a practical perspective, these findings indicate that efforts to improve work-life balance cannot be addressed from just one side. Organizations need to provide policies that support work flexibility, fair distribution of workloads, and clear communication boundaries. At the city level, improvements are also crucial, such as

enhancing transportation systems, providing access to more affordable housing, and reducing the distance between residences and workplaces.

The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis that commuting and traffic congestion are not merely conditions that accompany workers' lives but are part of a mechanism that tangibly depletes individual resources. Therefore, the well-being of workers in urban areas cannot be understood solely as an individual or organizational issue but also as part of a broader development issue encompassing infrastructure, mobility, and urban planning.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that work-life balance among urban office workers is far more complex than simply managing time effectively. The findings suggest that employees' ability to maintain balance is shaped by a combination of personal resources, workplace conditions, and the broader realities of living and working in an urban environment. Drawing on thematic analysis of open-ended responses from 104 participants, the study shows that workers view work-life balance as a continuous effort to safeguard their time, energy, physical and mental health, family relationships, financial security, and personal boundaries.

Several factors emerged as important in shaping work-life balance, including workload, expectations around working hours, leadership style, organizational culture, financial demands, flexibility, and the availability of workplace support. Among these factors, urban mobility stood out as a particularly significant issue. Participants frequently described traffic congestion, lengthy commutes, transportation expenses, and commuting-related exhaustion as challenges that affect their daily lives. These conditions often reduce opportunities for rest, family interaction, exercise, and personal recovery. As a result, the study suggests that commuting and traffic congestion should be understood not simply as features of urban living, but as structural conditions that directly influence employee well-being by consuming valuable personal resources.

Viewed through the lens of Conservation of Resources theory, the findings indicate that work-life imbalance can be understood as a gradual process of resource loss. Employees expend time, energy, health, and emotional capacity while dealing with both workplace demands and the pressures associated with urban living. At the same time, the Job Demands–Resources framework helps explain why resources such as flexible work arrangements, supportive supervisors, manageable workloads, clear boundaries between work and personal life, mental health support, and assistance related to mobility can play an important role in helping employees cope with these pressures. The findings further suggest that achieving better work-life balance cannot rely solely on individual coping strategies. While personal efforts remain important, organizations also have a responsibility to create working conditions that support employee well-being. This

includes distributing workloads fairly, setting realistic expectations, respecting employees' personal time, and recognizing the importance of disconnecting from work outside official working hours. Flexible and hybrid work arrangements appear particularly relevant in urban settings because they can reduce commuting demands and provide employees with greater control over their schedules. Nevertheless, flexibility is most effective when accompanied by clear boundaries that prevent work from continuously spilling over into personal life.

This study contributes to Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) and the Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R) by showing that the pressures faced by urban workers extend beyond the workplace. In Jabodetabek, commuting time, transportation access, distance between home and work, rising living costs, and unequal urban infrastructure can all drain workers' time, energy, and emotional resources. These conditions affect how employees manage the boundary between work and personal life and ultimately shape their overall well-being. By linking work-life balance with wider urban issues, this study highlights that employee well-being should not be viewed solely as an organizational concern. Workplace policies remain important, but they are not enough when workers continue to face heavy commuting burdens and daily urban pressures outside the office. Therefore, improving work-life balance requires a broader approach involving both employers and policymakers. Flexible work arrangements, better transportation systems, more accessible urban services, and policies that reduce commuting strain may help improve workers' quality of life in highly urbanized regions.

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